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1980 heroin bust call CIA set-up

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By JOE TRENTO
Staff reporter

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — A well-connected Iranian immigrant struggled more than \$50 million worth of heroin into the United States, telling friends the CIA would use the money to finance the overthrow of the Khomeini regime.

Instead of helping pull off a coup in his homeland, the immigrant, Shahrokh Bakhtiar, 39, found himself behind bars in the United States, a victim of a Drug Enforcement Administration trap.

Bakhtiar and two of his Iranian friends were convicted of heroin trafficking. Bakhtiar was abandoned by the intelligence agency that recruited him.

The Sunday News Journal has pieced together the details of the operation from federal wiretap logs and interviews with intelligence officials and principals in the case. They show:

- In early 1979, present and former CIA men approached Bakhtiar and asked him to refrain from filing suit against top CIA officials and the fallen shah for the assassination of Bakhtiar's father.

- In exchange, Bakhtiar was told that if he assisted the CIA in helping his cousin (former prime minister Shahpour Bakhtiar) overthrow Khomeini, the CIA would see that he got his share of his father's half-billion dollar estate.

- CIA officials told Bakhtiar that under Carter administration orders they couldn't finance the coup, but if Bakhtiar was willing to travel to Iran to tap into the heroin resources of his family, the agency could provide him with a "safe" buyer to raise the money.

- Bakhtiar's friends warned him

that the scheme might be a trap to silence him but he ignored their admonitions.

Bakhtiar's father, Teymour, had been the second most powerful man in Iran until 1973. His friendship with such CIA luminaries as Richard M. Helms and others would come to haunt his son.

The elder Bakhtiar headed the SAVAK, the royal government's secret police and intelligence service.

Teymour Bakhtiar, on a visit to Iraq in 1973, was slain by two assassins sent in by the shah, according to CIA sources and Khomeini sympathizer Mehdi Samari.

As a young man, Shahrokh Bakhtiar grew up in Switzerland and attended the same schools as men like his father, the shah and former CIA Director Helms. Helms was a longtime family friend and former ambassador to Iran.

In early 1979 when the shah was thrown out, Bakhtiar decided to sue the U.S. government and the shah for the death of his father in the hopes of recovering a share of his father's estate. That estate is estimated by State Department sources to approach \$600 million.

A visit to famed Attorney Louis Nizer in early 1979 convinced Bakhtiar he had little legal hope of breaking loose any of the hundreds of millions his father left in Swiss accounts.

Donald E. Donetselya, a former CIA officer and friend of Bakhtiar, said: "Mike Bakhtiar was set up. He was in a position to reveal all kinds of things about CIA activities in Iran during the regime of the shah, and had threatened to do so in a lawsuit. The CIA sent old family friends around to ask him to help out. They wanted him to forget the suit, in exchange they would help get his share of his father's estate."

According to Donetselya, Bakhtiar became convinced in his dealings with SAVAK agents in the United States that the shah had betrayed him. He had believed he was dealing with officials whom he had believed were loyal family friends.

According to Donetselya, Bakhtiar inadvertently tipped off Helms and the CIA that he was thinking about legal action when he approached Helms' lawyer, Edward Bennett Williams, about taking on the wrongful-death case. Williams could not be reached for comment.

DONETSELYA said Bakhtiar then became more secretive about his activities and ignored warnings not to deal with the CIA.

By the late summer of 1979, Bakhtiar was meeting CIA contacts on the deal to import heroin to help overthrow the revolutionary regime and install his cousin, Shahpour, in power.

The CIA contact who was to find Bakhtiar a "safe buyer" for the heroin was another Iranian. What Bakhtiar did not know was that his contact was a Drug Enforcement Agency plant, and more important, an informant of the Khomeini secret police, called SAVAMA.

The informant used the assumed name of Michael D. Burke.

Burke's existence and his intelligence ties to Iran were closely guarded DEA secrets that were kept from the federal court judge and public in the April 1980 drug trial of Bakhtiar.

Today, Bakhtiar sits in Petersburg (Va.) Federal Correctional Institution serving a 15-year sentence for heroin trafficking. Co-defendant Mohammed Reihan is finishing the last four months of his sentence for aiding and abetting the heroin purchase. He is in federal prison at Danbury, Conn.

Another conspirator, Reza Mianegaz, got the shortest of the three sentences and is now free. But both Reihan and Mianegaz face deportation proceedings.

Bakhtiar, who has steadfastly remained silent about the case, faces four more years in prison before he can be considered for parole.

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Stormy Times for the U.S.

Washington faces losses, whoever wins in the Falklands



One of the first casualties in the war for the Falkland Islands has been the Reagan Administration's troubled attempt to mold its global ideology into a coherent foreign policy. Ronald Reagan came into office with an East-West world view that saw each crisis as a possible target of Soviet expansionism that must be vigorously opposed. Once again, unexpected events showed the world to be more complex than that, but no less challenging.

Plunged into the perilous currents of a South Atlantic struggle that nobody predicted, nobody wanted and nobody seemed sure how to control, the U.S. found itself trying to mediate between Argentina, a would-be partner in the effort to fight Communist influence in the Western Hemisphere, and Britain, a historic ally that is Washington's staunchest supporter in the NATO alliance. The more intense the battle between the two countries became, the more the U.S. stood to lose—and the more, it could be said, the Soviet Union might stand to gain. As former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger put it last week, "Sometimes you come up against a situation where you can't win."

The most immediate consequence of the conflict is the breakdown, at least for the moment, of Reagan's attempt to forge an alliance among nations in the Americas to fight Marxist influence in the hemisphere. Washington's decision to back Britain with sanctions as well as rhetoric has helped to divide the Americas once again along North-South lines. A sweeping alliance of left- and right-wing regimes, spanning the ideological spectrum from Cuba to Brazil, has rallied to support Argentina, miscasting it as a victim of colonialist subjugation. "The tilt toward Britain will destroy the coalition we must have if we are to prevent a Communist takeover of Central America," said North Carolina Republican Jesse Helms, the lone opponent of a Senate resolution endorsing a pro-British policy.

Whether the rift between the U.S. and its Latin neighbors will prove serious depends on how long the Falklands dispute lasts. While the U.S. and Britain are aligned against a Latin American nation, "Hispanidad," the tradition of Latin American solidarity, will remain at the fore, overshadowing a myriad of inter-American territorial and ideological disputes, like Argentina's quarrel with Chile over the Beagle Channel. Already there are mutterings within the Organization of American States about moving the headquarters of that hemispheric coalition out of Washington, or forming a purely Hispanic rival group. Said a senior O.A.S. official: "Never has the U.S. done so much so fast to destroy its image in Latin America." But some State Department officials still believe most Latin American nations, despite their verbal support for Argentina, are discomforted by the junta's use of force to settle its territorial dispute with Britain, and realize that their long-range economic and political interests are inevitably linked to the U.S. Says one optimistic analyst: "We should not take this lightly, but in six months it will be forgotten." One example of the attitude at work: Brazilian President João Figueiredo, even though he has condemned U.S. support for Britain, did not cancel his state visit to Washington this week.

The Administration tried hard to reduce the damage to its relations with Latin America. Secretary of State Alexander Haig wrote to members of the O.A.S. last week, assuring them that the U.S. is sensitive to their anti-colonial concerns. He said that the U.S. sided with Britain only to uphold the all-important principle of nonaggression, which decrees that force should not be used to resolve international disputes.

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